

2010

Review of *Sitting Bull* by Bill Yenne

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Barrett, Carole A., "Review of *Sitting Bull* by Bill Yenne" (2010). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2528.
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Sitting Bull. By Bill Yenne. Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2008. xv + 379 pp. Maps, Illustrations, appendices, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

Yenne's *Sitting Bull* is not so much a biography as it is a panorama of Northern Plains history from the time of Sitting Bull's birth, about 1831, to a period beyond his death in 1890. In this telling, Sitting Bull becomes the dominant figure in a history seeking to explain and analyze the great clash of cultures, lifeways, and worldviews that took place in the nineteenth-century American West. Yenne views Sitting Bull as an enigma, and by sifting through the "flickering amalgam of images" he seeks to present the reader with a portrait of a "great man . . . but also a human man."

An image of Sitting Bull emerges through examination of various sources: pictographic accounts of Sitting Bull's battle record, newspaper articles, diaries, and interviews of military men and warriors who knew Sitting Bull. Yenne peels the veneer from the images of Sitting Bull as the greatest leader of the Plains tribes, the killer of Custer, and the chief architect of the Indian wars, revealing him instead as a humble man dedicated to continuing the Lakota way of life for his people. Sitting Bull is

a man of his time and a man of his people, one of many players caught up in a complex struggle for cultural and political domination.

In situating Sitting Bull in a broader historic milieu, Yenne is prone to digress and shift focus. Mention of Sitting Bull's propensity to hunt buffalo on the American side of the border during his Canadian interlude prompts Yenne to launch into a long oration on bison hunting and the near obliteration of bison herds, complete with statistical data gleaned from railroad shipping records on processed buffalo robes and meat. In other places he provides pages of detail about various military officers, Indian legends, and a curious sidebar about the deaths of United States presidents. Yet he devotes only three paragraphs to the Sioux Act of 1889, even though Sitting Bull actively and bitterly opposed this bill. At times, the overabundance of information causes Sitting Bull to become a ghostly presence in his own story.

Yenne is strong in developing the story of Sitting Bull's time in Canada, Agent James McLaughlin's animosity toward him, and the time Sitting Bull spent in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. He is incorrect in stating that Sitting Bull signed the 1868 Treaty and in referring to the Sioux Act (1889) as a "treaty."

This book provides the general reader with a sweeping account of the deep complexities of nineteenth-century Plains history and politics.

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